2017

trends

*What's changing, what's adapting, what's different
in the world of internal communication in 2017*

BRINGING STORY
TO THE SURFACE

What can we learn from the scientists
and the master storytellers?

SEQUEL

Introduction

Welcome to our trends book for 2017.

In this publication we bring together our thoughts on the hot topics in internal communication. So whether you're in the midst of writing a comms strategy for a new team, or debating the relative benefits of a poster campaign vs a virtual reality video, here you'll find resources, insight and stories to inform your thinking.

One of the things we enjoy most about working in an agency is being able to share solutions between clients. Whatever industry you're working in, you'll probably find that your everyday challenges are much the same as those of your comms cousins working in other sectors.

The way you approach those challenges might differ according to your resources, structure and scale, but it's always rewarding for us to be able to share some of the conversations we've had with our clients and colleagues with others. This trends book gives us an opportunity to do just that.

We hope that these eight chapters will inspire you to tackle your comms challenges head on and take action to make tangible improvements in 2017, and beyond.

Paul Jones
Associate Director – Strategy, Sequel Group

About the writers:

Paul Jones is Sequel's Associate Director – Strategy and works with clients to help them improve their comms strategies and channels. He's a firm believer in the power of storytelling, but promises to use it only for good.

Suzanne Peck is MD of Sequel Group and President of the Institute of Internal Communication. She began her career as a journalist, moving into internal comms at M&S, Shell and GSK before IC agency life.

Fiona Allison is an experienced editor, working with clients' internal channels across digital and print, with a sharp eye for detail.

Editor **Carol Luck** started her IC career at NatWest before moving to Sequel, where she works with a wide range of clients on IC and external projects. She is a stickler for grammar... no grocer's apostrophes allowed!

Becky Leonard is an Editor, specialising in strategic content. She recently completed an IoIC Diploma in Internal Communication, achieving a Distinction. The assessors praised her "performance of consistently high quality across the board".

With a decade of experience in PR, marketing and internal communications, Editor **Melanie Blythe** works with clients to tell their stories in print, online and on screen.

Nick Andrews is Business Development Director at Sequel and he has more than 20 years' experience in IC. A former journalist, he works with clients to help make their important interesting.

As our Digital Director, **Charles Fenoughty** is a content advocate and audience specialist who enjoys the challenge of matching complicated audience requirements to the ever-changing digital world.

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Selling stories, influencing minds

Communicators need to be comfortable in so many different areas these days. It's not easy, but Paul Jones believes we can take a lead from other disciplines.

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AI: a new frontier for comms?

Aspic, Sequel's learning and networking group, has been championing internal communications for 20 years. As we celebrate this platinum anniversary in 2017, Suzanne Peck looks at how IC has changed – and wonders what might be next.

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Neuroscience: it's a no-brainer!

Does knowing about how the brain works really help us communicate more effectively? Fiona Allison believes it does – and says you don't need to be an expert to make the most of the latest research.

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SELLING STORIES, INFLUENCING MINDS

Communicators need to be experts in so many different areas these days; we need as much ammunition as we can get to help us share information effectively. **Paul Jones** believes we can take a lead from other disciplines... and explains the secret power of a hot drink...

THREE THINGS YOU'LL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER
• HOW SHARING STORIES CAN INFLUENCE YOUR COLLEAGUES
• WHY MULTI-TASKING IS SO INEFFICIENT
• HOW FORMER PRESIDENT OBAMA CONSERVES HIS MENTAL ENERGY

Why comms is crucial in changing times

" THAT THE TEMPERATURE OF A BEVERAGE CAN INFLUENCE OUR PERCEPTION OF A FELLOW HUMAN IS REMARKABLE."

It feels strange to be writing about what the future might hold for internal comms when we're in the midst of such uncertain times. As I type this, I've got one eye on the UK's Brexit negotiations and on the US as commentators try to work out what a Trump presidency will mean for our American cousins and, well, all of us really.

At this stage we don't know what's around the corner for the immediate and wider world... but what's clear to me is that, when people are uncertain, communication is absolutely crucial.

So, whatever the future holds, we have a fundamental role to play in sharing information, encouraging open debate and giving our organisations the best possible chance of success.

Of course, the ways in which we do those things are changing rapidly. Communicators really need to be experts in so many different areas these days: we're part data analyst, part psychologist, part IT support, part storyteller, part community organiser. And there are so many tools at our disposal, from the humble printed poster to the latest immersive videos, which allow us to do those things.

But that's not all. We also have more information and understanding to help us use those tools more effectively. We're learning more all the time.

As Fiona Allison outlines in Chapter 3, scientists' growing understanding of how our brains work is helping us to communicate more effectively.

Neurological research has informed some interesting ideas – often at odds with received wisdom. For instance, neuroscience suggests that, far from being a sign of the most super-efficient, multi-tasking is not a good thing at work: it's far better to do one thing at a time, properly.

I heard an amazing story about this at the 2016 IABC World Conference and I've been telling lots of people about it (so if you're one of them, please skip to the next section).

Scientists carried out an experiment in parallel processing – essentially they wanted to monitor how our brains work when we're doing more than one thing. It turns out that us humans are really, really rubbish at this.

In the experiment, volunteers were split into two groups. One group was given a hot drink for refreshment; the other was given a cold drink. Then everyone received a piece of paper that described the characteristics of an individual. There were no Derren Brown-style tricks here: the text was the same for everyone.

And what I heard next blew me away. I can't quite believe I'm about to type this but here goes...

The group given the hot drink described the individual they'd read about as a 'warm person'; whereas the people who had cold drinks described that person as, well, 'cold'.

That the temperature of a beverage can influence our perception of a fellow human is remarkable (also, good tip: if you want someone to like you, make them a cuppa).

This experiment shows why multi-tasking is so counter-productive: you may think that you're making informed decisions, but actually those choices may be being influenced by something else you're doing, without you even realising it.

Another tip from our neuroscientist friends is to put as much routine into your day as possible. This is because thinking is tiring. Making lots of small decisions about mundane things – such as whether to buy a Twix or a KitKat – is a waste of a finite resource: your mental energy.

Researchers have found that certain types of conscious mental actions draw from the same energy source, making it more likely that we'll make daft decisions later in the day.

Former President Obama is a firm believer in routine. In a *Vanity Fair* article he said: "You'll see I wear only grey or blue suits. I'm trying to pare

down decisions. I don't want to make decisions about what I'm eating or wearing, because I have too many other decisions to make."

We may not have the stress of holding a finger over the nuclear button, but we can apply the same principles in simple ways to help us work more effectively.

Remember Sir Clive Woodward's philosophy that helped England to win the Rugby World Cup? He looked for 100 things that he could improve by just one per cent each. Following former President Obama's advice is an easy way to make one of those improvements.

Instinctive belief

Neuroscience also provides the evidence for our instinctive belief that storytelling is the most powerful form of communication.

Organisations are frequently asking us for guidance to help them share more effective stories, because they connect with audiences.

Recently we ran a training session with a client organisation, as part of which we talked about presentation skills. We asked attendees to present at the start of the session about a topic they're passionate about. Most of them spoke about their favourite films, novels and places.

Then, after we'd spent a couple of hours running through some tips and exercises, we asked them to refine their presentations and to present them again, focusing on telling a story to the audience.

One of the attendees had spoken about her favourite novel. A colleague told her, after her second presentation: "The first time, I was mildly interested in the book you were talking about, but I wasn't really fussed about reading it. But during your second presentation I actually wrote the name of the book down, because I'm going to order it from Amazon on the way home."

We see similar examples from other organisations all the time. And there's a good reason for that: as far as our brains are concerned, there's no difference between hearing about an experience and actually going through it. This is why movies, for instance, are so enduringly popular.

So if you just want to focus on one improvement for 2017, we recommend learning from Hollywood movies and sharing stronger stories. And it doesn't matter which channels you use – in fact, as Suzanne Peck says in Chapter 2, the most effective approach today is to use a mix of print and digital channels.

But whatever the technology, we believe that good internal comms is about 'making the important interesting', and here's an opportunity to do just that.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:
A NEW FRONTIER FOR COMMS?

Aspic, Sequel's learning and networking group, has been championing internal communications for 20 years. As we celebrate this platinum anniversary in 2017, **Suzanne Peck** looks at how IC has changed – and wonders what might be next.

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THREE THINGS YOU'LL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER
• THE COMMS SKILLS WE'LL NEED IN THE FUTURE
• HOW ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS CHANGING IC
• WHY 'CHOICE' WILL BE THE BUZZWORD OF 2017

Intelligent internal comms

"HOW MUCH EASIER WILL THE TEXT APPROACH BE THAN A REMOTE EMPLOYEE LOGGING IN TO A SLOW VPN JUST TO LOOK UP A COLLEAGUE'S CONTACT DETAILS?"

Since 1997, Aspic (Association for Strategic Practitioners in Internal Communication) seminars and networking events have brought IC professionals together, showcasing how effective internal communication works through shared learning and great case studies.

We've looked at emerging trends, from the mobile revolution to measurement. Early on we talked about harnessing web technology and communicating effectively across cultures. By 2010 we were discussing resilience in tough times. More recent sessions have focused on intranets and the blurred lines between internal and external communications.

Over the course of those 20 years the role of the communicator has changed dramatically. Internal communication has gone from one-way (informing) to two-way (encouraging feedback and interaction). That change has largely been fuelled by massive leaps in technology.

While great communicators of the past relied on knowledge, today the emphasis is on knowing, understanding and engaging your audience, and using different creative ways to reach as many people as possible.

Bot's next?

Some of us remember when the fax revolutionised work for communications. No longer did you have to physically post any document, but you could send – and receive it back – almost instantly. Little did we know 20-plus years ago, but it was the beginning of the faster, sharper, 'I need it now' revolution.

We could never have foreseen people reading news on their phones or carrying that phone around with them, but as communicators we're curious about emerging technology and how we might be able to use it in the workplace.

Industry thought leader Shel Holtz has argued that the next big thing in comms will be plain text. That doesn't sound very exciting, but bear with me.

Firstly, there's a solid reason for expecting to see this development– and that's the evidence that smartphone users aren't using their powerful handsets to perform amazing, high-tech tasks, but instead to send text messages on apps like WhatsApp, or to use email services. In fact, there are now more users of the top four texting apps than the top four social media apps.

And, for us, using text services is potentially a very effective way of communicating with people working remotely.

But what could – and Shel argues, should – really make the difference are the latest developments in bot technology. "Bots are the short-term future of artificial intelligence," he says.

Bots are applications that perform an automated task. Apple's Siri is a bot, as is Amazon's Echo. Usually the goal is to mimic human interaction. You know when you're chatting to a sales adviser on a retail website? It's very possible you're chatting to a bot that has been programmed to respond to key words. If you ask something that the bot doesn't understand, it might pass the baton to a human, and then take it back to wrap up the conversation. All without you even realising.

Now imagine how this technology could work in internal comms. Engagement is the key here.

With bots, says Shel, "you can deliver information to people who want it and then enable them to tailor the content they see based on their interests.

"Imagine an employee sending a message to the company's internal communications chatbot: CHICAGO. Now the employee will get a daily message updating her on the latest news from the company's Chicago operation. Some of the words appearing in all caps can be used to reply for more information. (PICNIC, for example, or BENEFITS.) The messages the employee gets are relevant, and she has the option to dig deeper into the ones she cares about."

We're starting to see this technology filter into IC already – and internet integration is one likely development. Imagine your colleagues could use their mobiles to text your intranet bot to ask 'How many leave days do I have left this year?' or 'What is John Smith's phone number?'

There will be some tech and data challenges of course, but how much easier will the text approach be than a remote employee logging in to a slow VPN just to look up a colleague's contact details?

Keep listening

As well as keeping up with the ever-changing array of communication tools available, we must make sure that our messages rise above the noise. That's down to providing choice.

For the first time ever, we'll soon have people from five generations working side by side. Your reader / viewer could be in their 70s, or fresh out of school. Very few solutions will fit into the 'one size fits all' category any more (assuming they ever did).

We're finding success in giving employees choice about how they consume information. The same messages will be shared via print channels, online channels, videos, team meetings, manager briefings – a whole host of options. This gives you the best chance of reaching employees in a way that fits their needs and working styles.

The future

The world of internal comms is more challenging, interesting and rewarding than ever. Technology has given us an unrivalled opportunity, but we must make sure that the art of expert communication isn't lost along the way.

In the next few years we may see incredible advances in bot technology, virtual reality, or something else that's just a glimmer of an idea in Silicon Valley right now, but without great content there's no reason for those technologies to exist.

The freedom we have now to communicate in so many different ways shouldn't be at the expense of creativity or expert knowledge. If our focus remains on the people and the content, we'll be on the right track.

The first Aspic – Association for Strategic Practitioners in Internal Communication – session was held in 1997. What else was happening that year?

It was a big year in TV: Channel 5 joined the airwaves; while the BBC aired a new programme called *Teletubbies*

Harry Potter made his first appearance, in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*

BBC News launched a full-time online news service
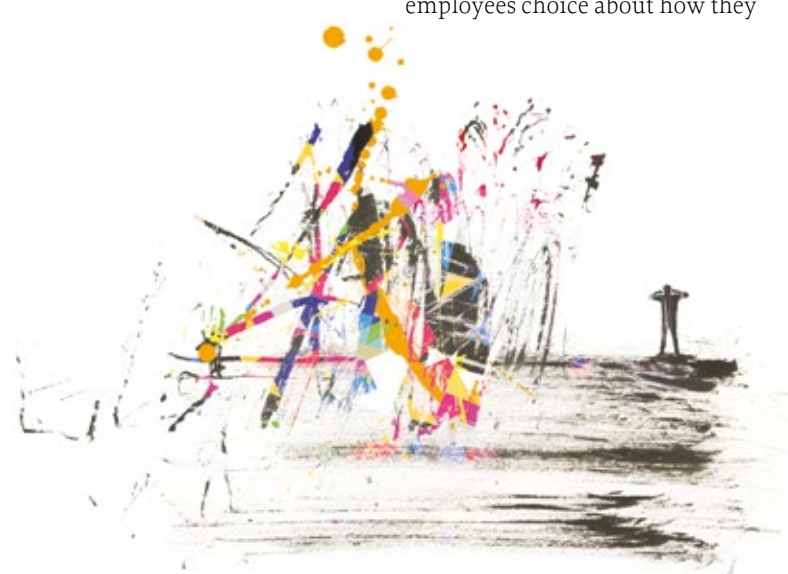
NEUROSCIENCE:
IT'S A NO-BRAINER!

Does knowing about how the brain works really help us communicate more effectively? **Fiona Allison** believes it does — and says you don't need to be an expert to make it work for you.

THREE THINGS YOU'LL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER
- THE TYPE OF COMMUNICATION THAT ENGAGES OUR MINDS
- HOW TO PUT NEUROSCIENCE THEORY INTO PRACTICE EVERY DAY
- THE LINK BETWEEN NEUROSCIENCE AND STORYTELLING

Mind how you go

" WHEN PEOPLE READ OR HEAR COMMUNICATIONS AT WORK, THEIR FIRST THOUGHT IS 'WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?' THEY ASK – AND ANSWER – THAT QUESTION SUBCONSCIOUSLY BEFORE THEY COMMIT TO LEARNING MORE."

Neuroscience is the study of the nervous system and brain, and how they work. Recently it's become a hot topic among internal communicators: after all, they reason, if we know how people think, we're in a better position to give them information that's easy to assimilate.

Powerful and precise MRI scanners have helped scientists map the brain and explore how it works, and those insights are now filtering through to the workplace.

Scans can show exactly what engages our minds and we're beginning to understand how people react to pressure, the different ways we learn and why some of us find it so hard to adapt to change.

One of the things researchers have found is that when we hear stories, our brains 'light up' in many different ways. Not just in the parts that process language, but in other areas that we would use when experiencing the events of the story too.

So, as far as your brain is concerned, there's little difference between actually experiencing an event and just hearing a story about it later. For more on storytelling, see the next chapter.

We learned more about neuroscience at the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) 2016 World Conference. Among the fascinating sessions was one from Subhamoy Das of Deloitte India, who explained that, by better understanding mental processes, communicators can hone their messaging for maximum effect.

He said that our brains can be divided into four regions: rewards, emotions, memories, and social interactions. He added: "So, while communicating we should take care of these four factors. Is there a reward? Are we appealing to the emotion? Are we making our communication memorable in any way? And since we know that our brain is inherently social, are we making our communication social and personal?"

Our minds want the most interesting information for the least amount of effort. This means that your comms output needs to appeal to people very clearly and offer them something they want to hear.

As a result, communication should:
- **Be self-centred** – outline the 'pain points' for your audience and use the word 'you'
- **Show contrast** – show before and after the solution
- **Be tangible** – show the value of the solution
- **Have a beginning and an end** – we have shorter attention spans these days, so aim for less and remove everything of no value
- **Use visual metaphor** – visual processing enters the brain first, so tell stories
- **Be emotional** – this helps us to remember, so make it personal
- **Use varied learning styles** – auditory, visual and kinaesthetic (practical).

There's similar advice in the Maritz Institute's communication model that's based on recent discoveries in neuroscience. The model says that people apply four filters to communications:
- **Emotional:** we pay attention to and respond to communications based on our emotions, values and experience
- **Historical:** based on our experiences and memories
- **Future:** based on our expectations, goals and hopes
- **Social:** based on our situation, including economic status, family, trends and traditions.

So what does this insight mean for communication? In short, our comms should directly appeal to the brain by being personal, reciprocal, simple / vivid, and memorable.
Personal means understanding your audience and making your message relevant to them. Provide context if it makes your message clearer.
Reciprocal is about building in ways for your audience to give feedback and find out more.
Simple and vivid communication works because it's direct and easy to understand. Make it complete too: don't leave obvious questions unanswered. Make it **memorable** so it will be stored in the brain. A list of facts and figures isn't memorable but a personal story or example of success is. Researchers at Vanderbilt University in the US found that audiences were more positive about 'narrative' advertisements than those using facts and arguments.

Hunting for news
Basically, we still think like hunter-gatherers. Human lives have changed tremendously since we first evolved into homo sapiens, but scientists think our brains have remained largely the same. They're 'wired' to understand what's going on around us, to keep us alive, avoid danger and overcome challenges.

At work this means that we subconsciously look for anything that might harm or benefit us. 'Harm' could include negatives like frustration, annoyance, or something that makes our jobs more difficult or less secure.
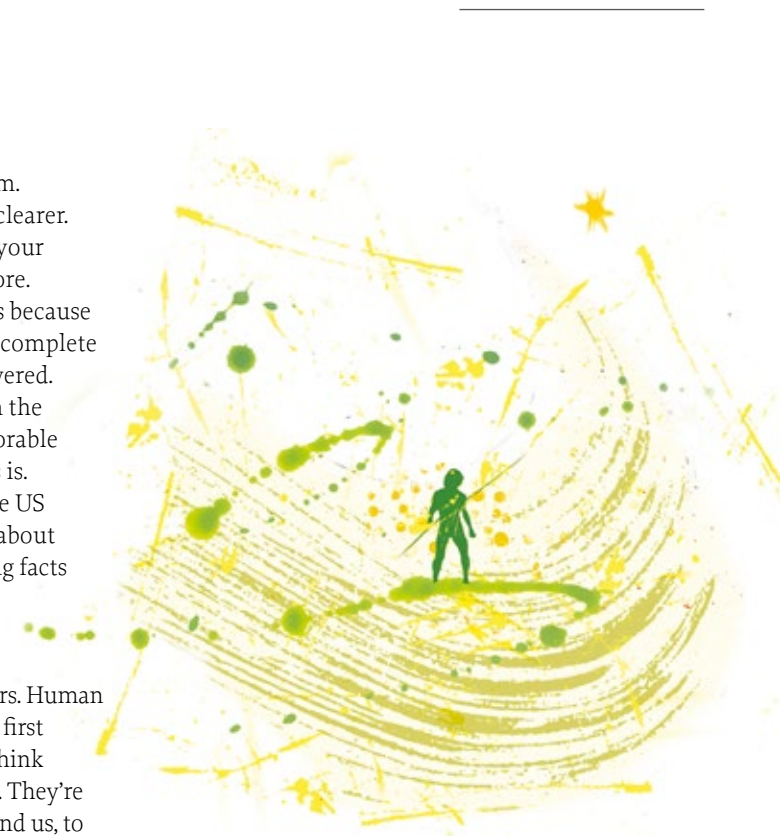
It also covers change, because subconsciously what we really want is to stay in our hard-won comfort zones despite all the exhortations to get out and try something new. We love routine: so much so that we tend to stick with bad habits even when we know they are doing us harm and there are opportunities to reject them and take a more positive approach.

We also look for rewards such as enjoyment, interest, opportunity or anything that will help make our lives easier.

So when people read or hear communications at work, this is why their first thought is 'what's in it for me?' They ask – and answer – that question subconsciously before they commit to learning more. If there's no interest for them, they'll turn off straight away, even if they do their best to look attentive or carry on reading your report.

Internal communication has traditionally been about telling people things. But with a better understanding of how people think, that's changing: the communicators of the not-too-distant future will use findings from neuroscience to good effect. By knowing how our brains receive and react to information they'll make sure their messages are more specific and better understood.

They'll make communications simple, because our minds want rewards easily, and they'll keep it personal, so it's memorable. After all, it's not brain surgery.

STORYTELLING: LEARNING FROM THE MASTERS

In an 'always on' communication environment, we know the demand for compelling storytelling in business is greater than ever. So what lessons can be learned from the master storytellers? **Carol Luck** takes a (metaphorical) trip to Hollywood to find out…

THREE THINGS YOU'LL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER
• HOW NOVELISTS AND SCREENWRITERS CONNECT WITH AN AUDIENCE
• HOW TO MAKE IMPORTANT INFORMATION STICK
• THE STRUCTURE OF ALL GOOD STORIES

Lights, camera, action!

> " IN LIFE, THE STORIES WE ENGAGE WITH MOST ARE OFTEN CENTRED ON UNIVERSAL TRUTHS LIKE LOVE, LIFE, DEATH, FAMILY, PAIN, ADVERSITY AND HOPE. THE BEST STORYTELLERS KNOW THIS INSTINCTIVELY. "

Great stories stand the test of time. Think of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Jane Austen's *Emma*, Martin Luther King's "I have a dream..." speech, Spielberg's *E.T.* blockbuster. Their enduring popularity provides convincing proof that you just can't beat a well told story.

As communicators we can learn a lot from the techniques used by these master storytellers.

Whatever the medium – a play, novel, speech or film – a great story has a beginning, a middle and an end. It's a structure that we can apply to business communications too: set the scene and outline the issue; describe how the issue was resolved; and conclude with what happened as a result.

But structure alone won't create a great story or strategy. We should also include the three all-important building blocks of storytelling: character, goal and challenge.

This approach to plot mechanics was summed up well in advice given to playwrights in the November 1897 issue of the *Bridgeport Herald*: "In the first act, get your principal character up a tree; in the second act, throw stones at him; in the third, get him down gracefully."

When we're communicating in a business context, it's usually pretty easy to identify the 'goal' building block – things like profits, efficiency, quality and the cold, hard facts. It can be much more difficult to track down the remaining two: the 'character' and the 'challenge' that will transform what could be dry business information into a memorable story. But that's our role as communicators. At Sequel, one of the phrases we use to describe our purpose is 'making the important interesting' – and this is where we earn our keep.

The secret lies in digging deeper, to find the 'hook' that will help us connect with the audience's emotions.

Emotions and universal truths

As we outline in Chapter 3, it's said that the human brain is 'hard-wired for stories'. Once we've cottoned on to the fact that a story is being told, we can start to picture it in our mind's eye.

In life, the stories we engage with most are often centred on universal truths like love, life, death, family, pain, adversity and hope.

The best storytellers know this instinctively. Take the opening line of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."

Or J M Barrie's *Peter Pan*: "All children, except one, grow up."

Or the tear-jerking ending in *Lord of the Flies*: "Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy."

Hmmm... you may be thinking, I've got to engage people with a new health and safety initiative. Where on earth am I going to find the universal truth in that? Well, the truth may well be there for the taking. But you'll need to talk to the people involved to find it.

Here's a good example. In his fascinating *Emotion Drives Stories* video, communications pro Rob Biesenbach explains how he was asked to write an article for a Chicago-based sweet manufacturer about the company's efforts to ensure quality. One of the people he interviewed was a factory worker called Astella, whose job it was to inspect the gum's quality before it left the plant.

Rob asked Astella how she did this and she explained the process, from the start to the end of the line. She showed him the X-ray machine and the many criteria she used to assess quality. Rob recognised that this was all interesting stuff, but that really it was just a series of facts; it wasn't a story.

But then he said to Astella: "Your kids must think you've got a really cool job." And that's when the real story started to unfold. Rob explains: "She lit up. She said to me 'are you kidding? I work in a candy factory – they love me!' And she showed me this code on the bottom of one of the packets of gum. The code tells you exactly when and where the gum was made, right down to the individual shift and production line.

"And her kids can read the code. So when they go to the store, the kids run to the candy aisle, turn over the packages of gum, look for the right code and when they find it, they say 'this is mommy's gum. My mommy made this gum.' That's a great story: here's a company that you can count on for quality. It's good enough for your family because Astella is down there on the line, making sure that it's good enough for hers."

As Rob explains, that story works because it connects with our emotions. And because it's about a universal truth: a mother's love for her family.

This mirrors the research findings of cognitive psychologist Gary Klein. In his book, *Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions*, he recognises the value of stories as a teaching tool: "We like to hear good stories retold. What is more interesting is our need to tell stories, again and again. Each telling helps us understand more about the lessons embedded in the story."

Great stories live on in our memories because they are *Made to Stick*.

That's the title of a book by Chip and Dan Heath. It describes how Chip ran a study where students at Stanford University were given some data on crime patterns and asked to deliver a one-minute presentation arguing for or against the idea that non-violent crime was a serious problem in the US.

Ten minutes later, the students were asked to recall the speeches. And the results make interesting reading: "63 per cent remember the stories. Only five per cent remember any individual statistic. The stars of stickiness are the students who made their case by telling stories, or by tapping into emotion, or by stressing a single point, rather than 10."

Power tool

I have an old edition of *The Economist* style guide on my shelf. I've kept it for years because it contains a wealth of sage advice, including the following gem: "Clarity of writing usually follows clarity of thought. So think what you want to say, then say it as simply as possible."

As communicators, it's down to us to know our audience and to root out the stories that will achieve an emotional connection with readers. Those stories need to be shared clearly so that they can be understood easily, without any distractions. By choosing our words carefully and framing them within a storytelling structure, we can harness the tremendous power of language.

It's a big responsibility. Because, as author Cassandra Clare says, "words have the power to change us".
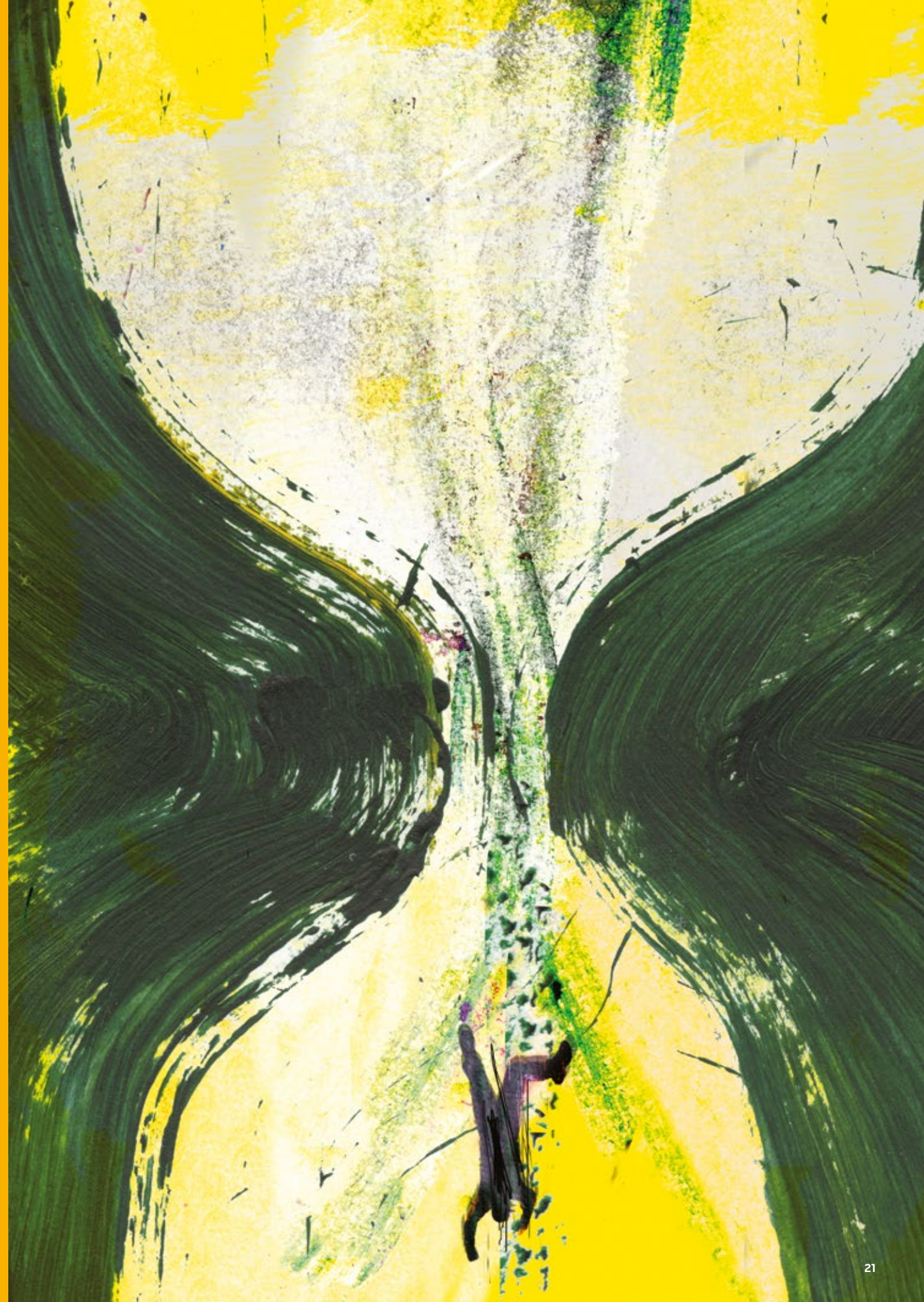
And she's right. They do.

CALLING TIME ON EXCUSES

Internal communicators often have a strange relationship with measurement. We say it's vital to our industry, while explaining all the reasons we don't do any. 2017 is the year to stop the excuses, says **Becky Leonard**.

THREE THINGS YOU'LL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER
• THE IMBALANCE BETWEEN INTENT AND ACTION
• HOW TO FIND FREE STATISTICS WITHIN YOUR ORGANISATION
• WHY 'LITTLE AND OFTEN' IS THE WAY TO GO

Never put off until tomorrow...

"
INSTEAD OF MEASURING HOW WELL YOUR MESSAGES GOT THROUGH TO YOUR AUDIENCE ... FIRST IDENTIFY IF YOU WERE EVEN SENDING OUT THE RIGHT MESSAGES AND IF THEY HAD THE POTENTIAL OF BEING UNDERSTOOD."

In my diary, a crumpled Post-it note sits on top of my daily to-do list. This Post-it contains my wishful thinking, filled with tasks – like 'book hair cut' and 'buy that poster you really liked in that shop that time' – that I'd really like to get around to, but lack the time or money to do.

It seems internal communication measurement is suffering the same fate. While we get on with our daily responsibilities, it sits on our 'other' to-do list, waiting until we have the time and / or money to get around to it.

A recent study from measurement gurus AMEC (the International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication) agreed, showing that the top barriers to measuring communications are a lack of people (52 per cent) and a lack of money (47 per cent) to do the work.

Yet there's no denying that measurement is seen as critical by internal communicators. In fact, in its *Inside IC: global summary report*, Newsweaver reports that 95 per cent of them say it's important or very important to measure the impact of IC.

It's time to destroy the discord between these two statistics and dispel the belief that measurement is too time-intensive and costly to get involved with. Because it doesn't have to break the bank or monopolise your time; there are lots of quick, cost-effective ways to bring measurement into your daily routine and ultimately help make your communications more successful.

Savvy savings
When it comes to monetary considerations, as ever, technology is the great equaliser. Anyone can create a slick-looking survey on free online survey tools like SurveyMonkey and Zoho. Although they do offer premium services, the basic packages offer features that meet the needs of a small-to-medium employee survey.

You can choose how users answer questions, whether that's picking from a drop-down menu, ranking different options or simply typing their response in a free-text box. Plus with the ability to download results in whatever format suits you best (PDF, Excel etc.), recording and gathering the results for analysis is a piece of cake.

There's also a world of data available in a free subscription to Google Analytics. You can track the traffic on your online offerings – from intranets to e-zines – to see how your audience is engaging with your content. You can examine user behaviour, from how many people are looking, to what they're looking at and for how long.

Then there's the good old telephone call. You could get regular feedback from a quick telephone survey with a small group of employees, picked at random.

When measuring the impact on employee engagement in particular, there's also something to be said for looking outside your immediate sphere too. Our friend Susan Walker points out that your company will have a host of other statistics you can commandeer for your purposes, at no additional cost.

She recommends making the most of statistics like "absenteeism, employee turnover, customer research, productivity, benefits use, promotion applications, ideas / innovations, attendance at town halls, emails, and usage of message boards and social media." You can compare these statistics to your communication efforts and objectives to see where you're making an impact.

Life hacks
"That's all very well and good", I hear you saying. "But even if I don't have to eat into my budget, where am I going to find the time to do this?"

The good news is there's no need to start setting aside hours for measurement; there are opportunities in many of your existing everyday tasks.

For instance, when you've released a new piece of communication, combine your trip to the kettle with a little recon and see if the people around you are engaging with it. And make sure you note down any ad hoc, anecdotal feedback that comes your way, whether it's in an email or in passing in the corridor.

You could even sneak a few questions about communications into your daily routine as you hold meetings, make phone calls and send emails. All it takes is a quick: "By the way, while I have you, what did you think of X and Y?"

And if you're nervous about taking up too much of your employees' time, as well as your own, Angela Sinickas suggests you start by turning the measuring tape on yourself.

She suggests that "instead of measuring how well your messages got through to your audience ... first identify if you were even sending out the right messages and if they had the potential of being understood."

This can be done by examining your communications to see if they match up with your organisation's needs, such as reflecting company values and covering an even spread of business units and locations.

Then look at your writing itself, she says – is it remotely understandable? Microsoft Word has a tool that measures how 'readable' your writing is by telling you how many years of education it would take to understand it. There are more advanced text analysis tools that can assess your language in more detail too.

I suggest you take this even further by setting up a master content log. Divide it by the elements you want to measure, such as which company values are reflected in the content and which locations it features (these could be office- or country-specific depending on your company).

Fill it in as you go so you can review it at the end of each quarter with a smug, *Blue Peter*-style "here's one I made earlier" feeling. You'll have a ready-made measure of your content's messages and spread, and be able to see where you need to apply more effort.

Of course, volume on its own isn't enough – you also need to understand how the messages have been received and what impact they've had. But, as Angela says, it's far better to capture at least observable measures of your communication's impact than to sit back and wait until you have the time and budget to do it all.

Seal the deal
So it's clear that you don't need to be rolling in resources to make measurement worth your while. Just don't forget your most precious commodity isn't money or time; it's context.

Because we believe if you have a clear understanding of what you're measuring and the audience it affects, your results are more likely to inform and improve your communications. Which is the point of measurement in the first place.

And if you haven't, and are left staring blankly at a sheet of seemingly disconnected data wondering what on earth this all means, well, it's probably time for you to start thinking up a new set of excuses...

BRAND UP AND BE COUNTED

As the lines between internal and external communication continue to blur, switched-on organisations are realising that focusing on employer and employee branding can provide a fresh way of thinking about engagement. So **Melanie Blythe** asks: "How can we help employees become real brand advocates?"

THREE THINGS YOU'LL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER
• HOW TO HELP EMPLOYEES HAVE PRODUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS
• WHY AN EMPLOYEE BRAND COMPLEMENTS YOUR EMPLOYER BRAND
• HOW BARBECUES CAN INFLUENCE YOUR ORGANISATION'S REPUTATION

How do you describe your company to your friends?

" WE HEARD A GREAT STORY ABOUT A US COMPANY THAT HAD CREATED WHAT IT CALLED INFORMALLY A 'BARBECUE APP'. ESSENTIALLY IT WAS A COLLECTION OF USEFUL INFORMATION THAT AN EMPLOYEE MIGHT WANT TO SHARE AT A BARBECUE ON GETTING THE 'SO WHAT DO YOU DO?' QUESTION."

The importance of a strong *employer* brand – an organisation's value proposition for employees – is well known and can have far reaching consequences. But an *employee* brand can be just as powerful.

But let's take a step back. An employer brand covers the kind of treatment, opportunities and rewards an employee might expect from a company. It helps attract staff and can shape how consumers see a business.

Consider the less-than-stellar employer brand of UK sports retailer Sports Direct (according to newspaper reports, its Shirebrook warehouse is known locally as 'the gulag'). Last summer, the company posted an 8.4 per cent drop in underlying annual profit. This was partly because of challenging conditions on the high street, but some customers and potential employees were alarmed by media reports about the company's treatment of its workers.

Google, on the other hand, has its pick of the bright young jobseekers partly because its employer brand is so highly regarded and well known.

Employer or employee brand?
So if your *corporate brand* is your value proposition for customers, and your *employer* brand is your value proposition for current and future employees, what is your *employee brand*?

Simply, it describes a worker's own reputation within your company and the extent to which they serve as a brand ambassador within and outside the workplace. It's about how your people embody and reflect their company's image and corporate brand values.

Focusing on your employee brand is a way of thinking about engagement that challenges internal communicators to help colleagues become brand advocates.

Through social media, people can now have a public platform and a tuned-in, personal audience,

and that means every employee is a potentially powerful ambassador.

What they say about your company on social media can undo or reinforce everything Marketing and HR have put into your corporate and employer brands.

It's not just online, either: whether it's in the pub, at a neighbour's barbecue or in front of the school gates, what your people are telling their friends and family about their job as they live their lives has an impact in the community.

This is crucial, because a Forrester study found that only 10 to 15 per cent of people trust posts by companies or brands on social media sites, while 61 to 70 per cent trust brand or product recommendations from friends and family.

Internally, too, the employee brand has an important role to play; engaged employees act as role models and have a positive influence on their peers.

What good is it spending millions on your corporate brand, or investing time and resources in shaping your employer brand, if employees can

dismantle those carefully crafted value propositions with a few choice tweets?

It happened to HMV in 2013, when disgruntled employees took over the company's official Twitter account to express horror at mass retrenchments, using the hashtag #hmvXFactorFiring.

But of course there's a potential upside as well. The Forrester report we mentioned earlier noted that: "Allowing employees to participate in social media on behalf of the brand has huge benefits. It allows brands to participate in millions of additional conversations on social media and employees are motivated brand advocates who know the product and want the company to succeed."

What we can do
The way that employees feel about their employer is influenced by a wide range of factors, some of which we have no or little control over. But where we can make a difference is by helping to make sure that colleagues are empowered, inspired and given the freedom to act as brand ambassadors within, and outside, the workplace.

We can give employees reasons to believe in their organisation. We can encourage them to talk about their company, and give them good stories they'll want to share, in a shareable format. And we can give them clear guidelines about their remit: for instance, when it's time to hand off a social media discussion to a colleague in the Media team.

In a way, employee branding asks us to fill the public relations role, internally: instead of feeding journalists with stories, we are feeding employees, and hoping they will tell everyone they know in turn.

We heard a great story about a US company that had created what it called informally a 'barbecue app'. Essentially it was a collection of useful information that an employee might want to share at a barbecue on getting the "So what do you do?" question from a fellow guest. And the really nice touch was that the company designed it in such a way that you could navigate the app easily with one hand... assuming that you were likely to have a beer or a hot dog in the other. That's what you call 'designing with users in mind'!

Employees as advocates
As companies recognise the potential of the employee brand, many are now designing 'employee advocacy programmes' to formalise their approach.

This can be as simple as making an official appeal to employees to promote the company on their own social media networks, or offering ready-made content that employees can edit and share.

Link Humans reports that global communications company AT&T has seen great results from this approach. It found that people are much more likely to engage in dialogue with employees of the company than with official channels.

But this isn't just about giving employees content to share; you can also give them their own social media platforms to speak candidly about work life. Nationwide Building Society's @NBSemployees Twitter account, for example, shows how an employee-focused account can influence the corporate brand.

As well as official Nationwide employees' tweets, employees retweet the feed's posts to their personal audiences and use the Twitter handle in posts about work. The result is a continuous flow of content projecting a positive image of Nationwide, internally and externally.

Other companies appoint official 'brand ambassadors' who are trained and supported to help them get the best value out of their content and their networks.

IBM and many others offer public platforms where employees can post thought-leadership blogs on topics of interest. Fellow employees then share this content, helping it reach a wider audience still.

It's also worth considering which social media channels your employees use – they may be already using channels you haven't considered, so find out and include them in your strategic planning.

And if you don't have a formal brand advocacy programme in place, remember that the work you do as an IC professional is by its very nature helping to nurture strong employee brands in your organisation. Employees will decide which stories they want to tell – whether online or at the pub – so make sure you keep them informed and inspired.

WHY PAGE TURNERS PLAY TO THE SENSES

The death of print has been predicted for many years, yet printed materials are still very much with us (as the book you're holding shows). **Nick Andrews** ponders the purpose of print in a digital, social world.

THREE THINGS YOU'LL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER
• HOW PRINTED MATERIALS HELP READERS TO UNDERSTAND INFORMATION
• WHY WE THINK THE GROWTH IN PRINT WILL CONTINUE THIS YEAR
• HOW PRINT TECHNOLOGY CONTINUES TO DEVELOP

Take a screen break

Here in high-tech 2017, reader expectations are sky high. We want to access information instantly, wherever we are and whenever we want. Anything less than full connectivity is a source of frustration.

To accommodate the copious amount of digital information that can bombard us on our various devices, we've had to adapt the way we read. The traditional, linear reading style has become something of a luxury for me, and I often find that scanning and scrolling are the best ways to take in information online.

So how has a static medium like print managed to survive amidst all this change? It doesn't satisfy our need for speed. And it has zero chance of keeping up with the frenetic pace of online news channels – these days a printed news story can become out of date before the ink has dried.

With printed material there are no hyperlinks for readers looking to devour additional details (Jakob Nielsen uses a great term to describe this activity: "information foraging"), no video clips to watch, no tweets to follow. The reach is determined by the print run. And then there are of course the printing and distribution costs to add on to the final bill.

Digital channels aren't going anywhere any time soon, but there are many reasons why print remains a viable channel.

For starters, printed materials can be read at a time that's convenient to the employee, whether that's during a coffee break, on the tube or at home. In fact, they can be picked up and dipped into repeatedly at the reader's leisure and with minimum effort. No login details required… bliss.

When we're carrying out communication audits for clients, their employees often tell us that, while there are things they love about digital tools, they appreciate the chance to take a break from their screens every now and then too.

Perhaps surprisingly, this feedback comes from people of all ages, including younger employees who've grown up with these digital tools and find it hard to imagine a world before the smartphone.

Christina Noone is Sequel's Associate Director – Commercial and one of our print specialists. She says: "When an organisation has a message to communicate to the workforce, it's important to be able to reach all employees – including those who work out in the field and / or in a business area where PCs aren't so accessible.

"In this scenario, print can provide a solution with materials delivered to employees, helping to keep them connected with company and colleague news.

"The print medium itself is no dinosaur – it's evolving and innovating to meet the needs of businesses and consumers for speed, quality and value.

"There's a broad range of print options available, and digital print is continuing to advance in the short to medium print-run market, with products ranging from small leaflets to large, wide-format posters."

A sensory experience

And then there's the fact that readers can actually hold a physical publication in their hands. There's nothing quite like opening a newly purchased book or magazine, all fresh and shiny and ready to devour.

Phil Steed, Sequel's Head of Creative, says: "For me, print's strength is that it plays to our senses. The smell, the look, the feel and actually handling something physical… it involves us in a sensory experience. It's something really special that just can't be matched in the digital realm."

That particular quality is why many organisations are now opting for print when producing a 'special issue' of a publication for employees to read, connect with, remember and perhaps even keep.

Last year we saw a growing demand for printed materials from our clients; and we expect this trend to continue into 2017 as organisations search for an appropriate comms mix that meets the needs of their audience(s).

Comprehension consensus

Researchers have demonstrated that when it comes to comprehension, print is more effective than digital. In a study carried out at the Reading Centre of Norway's University of Stavanger, 72 teenagers were divided into two groups. They were each required to read two pieces of text: one was factual and the other was fiction. Students in one group read the information as a PDF on a computer screen and their counterparts read it on paper.

Reporting on the results of this study, Arnfinn Christensen said they "clearly demonstrated that those who had read on computer screens had understood less than those who read on paper" and that "this disparity was encountered with both the fiction and the factual prose".

So it follows that if you have complex messages to communicate – ideas that need to be digested and understood – print is a fantastic option.

Finding the right mix

Paper-based communications have been part of human civilisation for more than 2,000 years. In fact, despite its apparent simplicity, it's fair to say that paper is one of mankind's most brilliant inventions.

So we've every reason to expect that in the world of internal communications, print will remain a force to be reckoned with for many years to come.

Perhaps it's time to stop talking about 'print v. digital' and their supposed fight for supremacy. Each has its own strengths, but it's often when they are combined as part of a co-ordinated multi-channel approach that they become most effective.

Print brings a **physical** and **emotional** connection to an organisation's brand and values	**91 per cent** of printed materials sent out are opened by the recipient	Print is unique in its capability to **trigger** a number of **senses** (sight, feel, touch, smell)	Readers of print spend on average **21 minutes** reading – especially longer articles	Print has a **59 per cent** rate for better comprehension of complex information

Mobile content was supposed to be the panacea for organisations wanting to reach employees who aren't desk-based. But, **Charles Fenoughty** argues, it isn't enough to send out a responsive site and say "we've gone mobile"...

MAKING WAVES IN MOBILE

Avoid the 'one size fits none' trapdoor

Mobile content technology is evolving at an astonishing rate. Five years ago Sequel was regularly designing two separate versions of content for our client communications: one for mobile and one for desktop. But that's old hat now. Responsive sites are the order of the day.

These give organisations and employees the ability to harness the downtime, whether that's during a coffee break, in a lift, on the train or at home.

Make access child's play
Creating a responsive site is just the start.

This isn't Kevin Costner's *Field of Dreams.* The harsh reality is that, if you build it, they will not come unless they want to – and even then, if accessing the site is anything less than child's play, they'll give up at the first hurdle.

So this year, if you want to increase the percentage of traffic coming from reading on mobile, you have to make it easy for users to access your site.

Mobile intranet sites can't be accessed using a search engine and it's too much to expect employees to open Safari on their mobile, clicking on the address bar and typing in a huge web address.

So if you have a mobile responsive site, create an automatic script that puts an icon on the user's mobile home screen. It may look and function like an app, but it isn't an app.

Taking this approach means there aren't any complicated addresses for users to type in, no Google searches, no finding old emails and references – the user just touches the icon and, bingo, they're in.

Stay specific
From an internal communications perspective, apps are brilliant news.

But don't spend most of 2017 creating an amazing app that does everything for everyone in your organisation. That would be complex and costly, and you'd end up with a monster that pleases nobody.

The best apps are small, cheap and fast to market. They have limited functionality because they're designed for a specific purpose.

Using apps, employees can customise their 'digital stack' to suit their needs. Let's say a company has 20 mobile apps available. Each employee downloads all the apps they need in order to do their job. Some will be common to all, like news, timesheets and holiday requests, while others will be relevant to a particular job role or a shared project. And if the home screen starts looking a bit crowded, they can move the icons to a folder called 'work'.

Instant gratification
When it comes to designing responsive sites, the buzz phrase is 'mobile first'. However, some organisations (Sequel included) have taken things to the next level: 'mobile simultaneous'. This is a design approach that makes sure users have an excellent experience on desktop and mobile; it recognises that although most corporate users still consume their content on desktop, mobile is just as important.

Users are looking for instant gratification. They don't want to wade through screen after screen

> **JARGON BUSTER**
> • **Mobile content** – generally speaking, this means intranet or magazine content that's designed to be viewed on a mobile phone. The experience also works well on a tablet (and a phablet), but these devices very rarely come with a sim card, so can only access mobile content when connected to Wi-Fi
> • **Responsive site** – a site that creates the content once and then automatically shapes it to fit the user's device – desktop or mobile.

Heineken recently launched a mobile app, built by Sequel, which helps employees to track their intake of alcohol units and calories. During the development phase, speed was of the essence, so distributing it via Apple's App Store (with its potentially lengthy approval process) wasn't an option. Instead, Heineken purchased an Enterprise Distribution Certificate and sent an email announcing the app's launch to employees, who then clicked on the link, confirmed that it was a 'trusted app' and downloaded it to their devices.

CASE STUDY: Kerry Foods
The FEIEA award-winning *Kerry Foods Insight* bi-monthly magazine is a great example of what good design can achieve. It's fully responsive, so looks great across all devices. It uses all the latest web technologies available and incorporates current best practices for design – switching from Flash to HTML was a giant leap forward.

The home page is the index and has a clean, uncluttered look. There are direct links to related stories and the site has sparked a far richer dialogue with (and between) users. The site also includes built-in gamification and a facility for users to view video in HD.

CASE STUDY: Clifford Chance
Global law firm Clifford Chance uses a mobile site to allow employees to access its *CC World* internal publication. It pushed a launch icon to their screens – to access *CC World* on their device, they simply touch the icon and then type in the same username and password that they use on their work computer. They can even access the site on their Xbox!

of information. Having to wait more than a few seconds for a page to load is a source of frustration. Your site must be easy to navigate.

Having such a small mobile screen to work with means that we have to identify and prioritise the crucial features of the intranet or the publication and then make them easy and quick to access. This involves 'hiding' non-essential items and looking at the design in a 'top down' way, rather than from left to right.

Seeking security
Many organisations shy away from providing mobile intranet access because of concerns about security breaches and data sprawl. Large organisations in particular are concerned about loss of control, but there are solutions available.

One of the simplest is to make sure that confidential or sensitive information isn't accessible on your responsive site. Or include a security module (a single sign-on) that replicates the security detail that employees already use within the organisation.

Conclusion
So here's a summary of our advice for 2017. Most importantly, your responsive site needs to look great on any device. Keep pushing out emails notifying employees of new items. And make it easy for users to access and navigate through it.

Don't get despondent if your mobile traffic takes time to grow. Building loyalty takes time.

No matter how amazing, accessible and informative your mobile site is, whether employees use it or not depends on the willingness of the individual. You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink – especially if you're expecting them to use their own device.

Creative lead: Phil Steed, Sequel Group

Illustrations: Simon Pemberton, courtesy of Heart Artists' Agents. Founded by Darrel Rees in 1994, Heart represents 35 international illustrators from the USA, France, Germany, Italy and the UK via offices in London and New York.
@Heart_Agency

Simon Pemberton studied at The London College of Printing, followed by Central Saint Martin's. He works from a shared studio in East London. Simon's background is collage, and his work is created by collaging brush marks. Multiple layers exist in Photoshop of an assemblage of marks. Some may be from a pre-existing library Simon keeps, or some may be created specifically for an artwork and then added to the library. The tensions, as well as the beauty, of nature are things that are often explored in Simon's work: huge skies and vast landscapes, and a figure or figurative element on the horizon line creating a focal point and sense of scale.
@pemberton_simon

Want to know more about how Sequel can
help you meet your challenges in 2017?

Or would you like a bespoke presentation for your team to
drill down to your specific challenges based on this report?

Talk to Paul Jones (paul.jones@sequelgroup.co.uk) or
Nick Andrews (nick.andrews@sequelgroup.co.uk)

SEQUEL

We blend creative content, insight and
technology to bring business stories to life